

POOR COYOTE'S CABIN  
NEZ PERCE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK  
SPALDING  
NEZ PERCE COUNTY  
IDAHO

HABS No. ID-75

HABS  
ID  
35-SPALD,  
3-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
~~SCETCH PLAN~~

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
WESTERN REGION  
DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR  
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94102

HABS  
ID  
35- SPALD,  
3-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
POOR COYOTE'S CABIN

HABS No. 10-75

LOCATION: The cabin is located beneath abandoned U. S. Highway Route 95, in the town of Spalding (Nez Perce County), in Nez Perce National Historical Park, Idaho.

U.S.G.S. (15') Lapwai, Idaho Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator coordinates: 11/514330/5143880

PRESENT OWNER: National Park Service

PRESENT USE: Vacant

SIGNIFICANCE: Built after 1880 in or near Coyote Gulch approximately 2 miles west of Spalding, Idaho, this cabin was occupied by a Nez Perce Indian named Poor Coyote. In 1936 Joe Evans moved the cabin to a site near Spalding Memorial Park for use as part of his museum operation. When the Clearwater River flooded in 1965, the cabin was moved again a short distance to the east, beneath an abandoned highway overpass. The structure's integrity has been compromised as a result of deterioration and a move in which the logs were numbered for identification but reassembled incorrectly. It is not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places but does retain substantial historic interest as an important and rare surviving example of Nez Perce acculturation.

## PART I. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The provenance of the log structure known as Poor Coyote's Cabin is unclear. It is generally believed to have been built some time after 1880. The original builder remains anonymous, but a Nez Perce Indian named Poor Coyote was known to have occupied the cabin from 1895 until his death in 1915.

It is generally believed that the cabin was originally built in or near Coyote Gulch, a locale approximately 2 miles west of Spalding and that in 1900 it was still at Coyote Gulch. However an alternative explanation of the cabin's origin exists. One source (Sam Watters) believes it was built and inhabited by an Anglo trapper prior to Poor Coyote (or another Nez Perce), and that it was originally located closer to the Clearwater River and its present day site. In either case, it was moved to a location in Spalding, near the agency log building, in 1936. This was accomplished by Joe Evans who, with his wife Pauline, operated a museum at Spalding and wanted the cabin for a museum exhibit. The cabin was filled with Indian artifacts and interpreted as the "Sundown Jackson" or "Jackson Sundown" cabin. Jackson Sundown was a Nez Perce who achieved fame as a world champion rodeo rider in the early 20th century. No evidence, however, exists linking Sundown Jackson to this structure and the Evans are known to have made false statements regarding the cabin's history and other relics in their possession. The cabin remained an exhibit until 1965.

Poor Coyote's Cabin was moved a second time in the mid-1970's some time after the Clearwater River flooded. The site selected for this final relocation was under a now abandoned highway (old U.S. 95) overpass, a short distance to the west. Prior to dismantling the structure for the first move, someone (Evans?) numbered each log, probably to facilitate the reassembling of the cabin. The numbers, visible on the logs today, suggest the cabin was reassembled incorrectly. Since the second move, the cabin has been vacant and unused.

In this incongruous location, Poor Coyote's Cabin has been relatively well protected, despite its deteriorated condition. Only a small percentage of the cabin's remaining fabric appears to be compatible with its late 19th century origins; sill logs, roof covering, window sash, chinking, interior surface materials, and probably the purlins all appear to be later additions, most likely dating from the Evans' era.

Despite its loss of integrity, Poor Coyote's Cabin retains historic significance as an important example of Nez Perce acculturation. It may be the only log building surviving that is associated with these Indians. While existing ethnographic studies do not discuss Nez Perce erecting log cabins for their own use, the use of log buildings by them is not unlikely. The Nez Perce adopted many cultural artifacts from white trappers, settlers, and missionaries and could have adopted the log building. Present evidence suggests that if the Nez Perce did use log building methods, it was a transitional form between their native forms of shelter (longhouses, tipis, and pithouses) and the use of frame building techniques which began in the 19th century (Note: a sawmill was constructed during the first missionary period (1836-1847) by Spalding). Poor Coyote's Cabin may thus represent this transitional stage in Nez Perce acculturation when log cabins were used by members of the treaty bands.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. Exterior

Poor Coyote's Cabin is a rectangular, one-story, gable-roofed log cabin approximately 13' 10" x 17' 4" in dimension. The structure does not sit on a foundation: a set of log skids with braces carries the building. The logs of the cabin are a combination of heavily-hewn, almost squared logs and slightly hewn ones. Those closest to the ground have been de-barked. On close visual inspection, faint numerals can be seen painted on the logs, lower value at the bottom of the structure, proceeding higher in sequence up through the gable. Numbers are missing on one or two sills logs and the spandrels. The logs without numbers show no sign of hewing. The chinking between the logs is a soft lime mortar with insets of highly colored stone up to 2" in diameter. This distinct chinking was done by the Evans.

The north, south and east walls each have one centered rectangular window opening, all with plain wood board trim. The window openings and casings appear to be original. The sash were 4-pane factory-built casements, 2' 0" wide by 2' 9" high, although these all appeared to be later additions to the building. Only one casement frame (no glass) remains on the north wall. The door opening is centered on the west elevation and has only one trim piece intact. The door is now missing, but based on earlier photographs from the Evans' era it was a 4-panel, 2' 6" by 5' 11", wood door with the top glazed (an upper transom?). The original door, as shown in a ca. 1900 photograph of the cabin when it was located at Coyote Gulch, appeared to be of board and batten construction.

The roof is a purlin system with direct gable bearing. Over the purlins is a layer of 1" by 12" sheathing boards running perpendicular, covered with a layer of tar paper and surface of 30" cedar shakes. The sheathing boards are nailed onto 2" wood blocking between the purlins. Four collar beams (one is missing) cross the structure parallel to the gables at plate height.

## B. Interior

The interior features of the one room cabin are few. There is no floor and earth is exposed. The milled lumber and two logs which support the cabin are exposed and sit directly on the earth. The Evans' had put in a floor of heavy, hand-split boards, but this deteriorated and was removed at an unknown time. It appears likely that the cabin originally had only an earth floor. The interior walls are finished with cedar shakes over corrugated cardboard, nailed to the logs with wire nails. There is no ceiling. The window openings have plain wood board trim. There are no plumbing or electrical systems within.

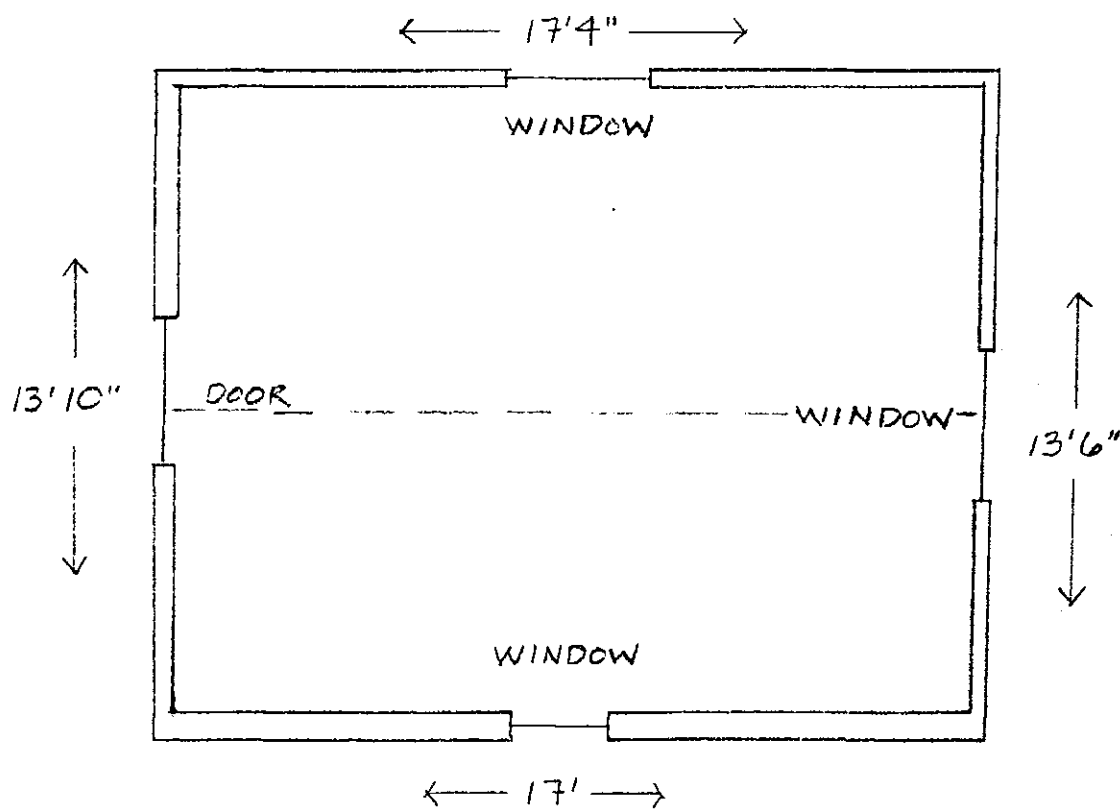
## PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

1. Henderson, David G. Draft Historic Structure Report, Architectural Data, Spalding Area, Nez Perce National Historical Park. Denver Service Center, National Park Service, June 1973.
2. History Files for Nez Perce National Historical Park, Cultural Resources Division, National Park Service, Pacific Northwest Regional Office, Seattle.
3. Idaho State Historic Preservation Office. Historic Property Report, Poor Coyote's Cabin. Typed manuscript, 6 pp. November 28, 1984.

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SKETCH PLAN  
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Poor Coyote's Cabin  
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(Pg. 5)



SCALE: Approximate  
1/4" = 1'-0"